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New York

President: Mr. Kavan ..... (Czech Republic)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 21

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/57/300)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/57/77, A/57/320, A/57/578)

Note by the Secretary-General (A/57/613)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/57/97, A/57/136, A/57/174, A/57/180, A/57/256, A/57/301, A/57/353, A/57/377)

Draft resolutions (A/57/L.33, A/57/L.41, A/57/L.42, A/57/L.43, A/57/L.46, A/57/L.47)

(c) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/57/130)

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan, who, in the course of her statement, will introduce draft resolution A/57/L.33.

Ms. Jarbussynova (Kazakhstan): I should like to take this opportunity to introduce draft resolution A/57/L.33 on international cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan. It gives me great satisfaction to announce that, since the publication of the draft resolution, the following countries have joined the list of sponsors: Argentina, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chile, Lithuania, Norway and Pakistan. My delegation would like to thank all of the sponsors for their contribution and strong support, and expresses its appreciation to the Ambassador of Luxembourg for facilitating the process of negotiations.

In 1991, the President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbaev, by executive decree, closed down the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground. That region was the site of numerous nuclear explosions over more than 40 years, and it is still suffering from their consequences. During nuclear tests, no measures were taken to protect the population from radiation and no medical examinations were conducted. As a result, in the Semipalatinsk region alone, approximately 500,000 people were exposed to radiation, the child mortality rate increased by five to 10 times and oncological diseases reached unprecedented levels.

Since the closure of the nuclear test site, the Government of Kazakhstan has done its utmost to

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stabilize the situation in the Semipalatinsk region, undertaking measures for human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development. In order to make real changes in the region, my Government, fully aware that international assistance should be supplemented by its own initiatives, formulated a health reform project, reinstated payments to assist victims of nuclear testing and took measures to clean up underground water that had been contaminated by aircraft fuel from the region's military base. The Government increased its support to orphanages, hospitals, schools and boarding houses and remains committed to pursuing the implementation of its programme for the benefit of the region's people.

Since the adoption of the first resolution on Semipalatinsk, in 1997, the United Nations system and the international donor community have devoted significant attention to the region's problems, delivering substantial humanitarian and development assistance to the affected population. The Tokyo International Conference on Semipalatinsk was extremely important for Kazakhstan because it raised the international community's awareness of the situation in the region and supported the region's comprehensive rehabilitation. The people and the Government of Kazakhstan greatly appreciate the financial and technical assistance already provided by the Governments of Japan, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, as a follow-up to the Tokyo Conference, to rehabilitate the Semipalatinsk region.

The draft resolution under consideration today, recognizing that the Semipalatinsk region remains a matter of serious concern for the people and the Government of Kazakhstan, stresses the need for continuing international attention and for additional efforts to solve the region's problems. It urges the international community to assist the Government of Kazakhstan in formulating and implementing special programmes and projects for the affected population in the region, since the situation there remains complicated.

The report of the Secretary-General (A/57/256) under agenda item 21 (b), which provides information on measures undertaken by the United Nations system, the Government of Kazakhstan and the international community over the past two years to rehabilitate the Semipalatinsk region, states that the scale and consequences of nuclear testing in the region are enormous and that its population remains exceptionally vulnerable to the economic, social and ecological challenges of the ongoing transition process.

In conclusion, I should like to express my confidence that the United Nations and the international community will continue to provide effective assistance to Kazakhstan in order to address the humanitarian, ecological and economic problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region. Once again, my delegation would like to thank the sponsoring countries and other Member States for giving their full support to the draft resolution. We hope that it will be adopted by acclamation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ethiopia, who, in the course of his statement, will introduce draft resolutions A/57/L.41 and A/57/L.46.

Mr. Hussein (Ethiopia): On behalf of the African Group, I have the honour to introduce, under agenda item 21(b), "Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions", draft resolution A/57/L.41 on international assistance for the economic rehabilitation of Angola, and draft resolution A/57/L.46 on assistance to Mozambique.

I should like to announce that since the publication of draft resolution A/57/L.41, the following countries have become sponsors: Andorra, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Romania, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sudan, Swaziland, Timor-Leste, Togo, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

After a long and protracted war, Angola is now on the path to peace and development. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on 4 April 2002 helped to end hostilities in the country and laid the basis for further consolidation of peace and economic rehabilitation, therefore deserving special mention. Since then, Angola, with the assistance of the international community, has witnessed tremendous positive developments. The adoption of draft resolution A/57/L.41 will further help create an environment enabling peace and development.

Likewise, the situation in Mozambique is a reason for hope and optimism. Indeed, the Economic and Social Council held a special high-level meeting to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the signing of the peace agreement in Mozambique. The country is now struggling to move forward despite natural disasters that have also impacted economic development tremendously. The adoption of draft resolution A/57/L.46 will complement the efforts of the Government to further consolidate peace and to continue economic development in the country.

At this juncture, I should like to announce that since the publication of draft resolution A/57/L.46, the following countries have become sponsors: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, India, Italy, Niger and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Finally, both draft resolutions have been discussed and agreed during informal consultations and, as I have stated, have numerous sponsors. It is the hope of the Africa Group that the Assembly will unanimously support and adopt both resolutions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil, who, in the course of the statement, will introduce draft resolution A/57/L.47.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): On behalf of the 56 delegations listed in document A/57/L.47 and the delegations of Armenia, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Iceland, Romania, Singapore and Turkey, who have joined the list of sponsors, I have the honour of introducing the draft resolution entitled "Assistance for humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and development for Timor-Leste".

The draft builds on the previous resolutions on this matter adopted by the General Assembly and takes into account the highly positive developments that have occurred since last year, the most important of which is the independence of Timor-Leste on 20 May 2002. It commends the people and leadership of Timor-Leste for achieving independence by democratic and peaceful means and recognizes the essential role played by the international community, including Member States, the United Nations, other intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in supporting Timor-Leste's nation-building. It highlights the role played by the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor under the leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and acknowledges the progress made in the transition from relief and rehabilitation to development, while recognizing continuing vulnerabilities of a humanitarian nature. It welcomes the efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the East Timorese refugees remaining in West Timor. The continuing efforts made by the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in facilitating national reconciliation and the return of refugees to Timor-Leste are equally commended.

This draft resolution welcomes the commitment of the international community to meet the country's external requirements for rehabilitation, reconstruction and development and urges Member States, the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations to continue to support the Government and people of Timor-Leste in facing the challenges remaining in the education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, judicial, public administration and law enforcement sectors. It recommends that institution-building and the training of civil servants, as well as infrastructure rehabilitation, particularly of public buildings such as hospitals, educational facilities, roads and public services, remain a focus of international assistance. It highlights the growing participation of East Timorese women in all aspects of society and encourages further efforts to address gender issues.

It is our hope that this draft resolution will be adopted by consensus, as was the case in previous years.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia and the associated countries — Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, align themselves with this statement.

The years that have passed since the adoption of resolution 46/182 have underlined the importance of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance as an instrument for bringing relief to people in distress. The increasing needs in connection with natural disasters and complex emergencies underline the importance of ensuring that assistance is provided with maximum efficiency and impact.

The need for greater coordination within the United Nations system, closer collaboration between

the United Nations and its non-governmental organization partners and coherent strategies with Governments has been underlined time and again. Another prominent trend has been the effort to better align humanitarian assistance with long-term development assistance in order to ensure a smooth transition. Further, there has been a growing recognition of the need to ensure an integrated approach in complex emergency situations, ensuring proper coordination of humanitarian assistance activities and political, economic, and human rights, as well as other possible measures, including peacekeeping. Given the importance of such developments, it is essential that Member States live up to their responsibilities by accepting the task of outlining overall directions for international work in the field of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

The European Union welcomes the fact that the Economic and Social Council's humanitarian segment succeeded this year in adopting a substantive resolution reaffirming basic humanitarian principles and addressing a number of current concerns.

The European Union has repeatedly used the debate under this agenda item to underline the importance it attaches to the question of the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel. In that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's report on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel (A/57/300). We wish to join the Secretary-General in his appeal to all parties concerned to fulfil their obligations unconditionally so that aid may be supplied in accordance with international humanitarian law. The European Union also wholeheartedly joins the Secretary-General in exhorting Member States to take stronger action to ensure that the perpetrators of attacks against United Nations personnel are brought to justice.

At the same time, we wish to express our appreciation to all humanitarian staff that continue to work in the most hazardous environments, often in extreme isolation, with very limited resources and often with insufficient protection.

The European Union is pleased to learn that steps taken thus far to reinforce the safety and security of the United Nations staff have produced tangible results. We also agree that the increase in threats facing United Nations staff necessitate additional reinforcement of the security management system. Hopefully, the appointment of a full-time United Nations Security Coordinator, at the Assistant Secretary-General level, will help provide essential leadership to United Nations efforts to strengthen security management. In that regard, the European Union welcomes the Secretary-General's report on a framework for accountability within the United Nations security management system and looks forward to its implementation.

At the same time, we note with some regret that, due to considerable delays in the recruitment of additional staff, the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD), has not been able to implement many of the initiatives detailed by the Secretary-General. We wish to take this opportunity to underline the urgency for UNSECOORD to be fully staffed and operational as soon as possible.

Furthermore, while welcoming the elaboration of general guidelines, we wish to stress the importance of progress in the area of security collaboration between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

Among the coordination tools the international community has placed at the disposal of the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeals Process (CAP) has a prominent position. Over the years, much progress has been achieved, and today the CAP seems to be working better than ever before. Agency training and buy-in is increasing. The CAP and the Common Humanitarian Action Plan have become the strategic planning tools for the humanitarian community. In many ways, the quality of planning and programming has been improved.

At the same time, it is clear that the CAP is not realizing its full potential. In particular, OCHA has repeatedly pointed out the need to overcome the pronounced financing discrepancies that exist between emergencies and between sectors. Part of that discussion has taken place under the heading of forgotten, or rather ignored, crises. The question of how to ensure that necessary improvements are made figured prominently in this year' s discussions during the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council and is reflected in the resolution adopted. Furthermore, many donors continue to seek to improve and strengthen the CAP in the context of the so-called Montreux process.

The European Union recognizes its responsibility to contribute to the financing of emergency needs on an equitable basis. Actually, as was made clear at a recent conference on forgotten crises in Copenhagen, the humanitarian assistance of the European Commission is needs-based and, as a matter of principle, also aims at covering needs in connection with long-lasting humanitarian crises. That is also a priority for a number of European Union member States.

The difficulties in establishing an objective basis for assessing needs are well known. Some donors have initiated important work with a view to establishing, on the one hand, more objective standards for judging needs and, on the other, identifying criteria that are central in donor decision-making.

In view of the wide range of transitional needs, there is general agreement that more has to be done in order to attract development funds and to better engage development actors. As regards Afghanistan, the appeal of the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for the Afghan People 2002, and the Transitional Programme for Afghanistan appeal for 2003 have demonstrated the advantages of an integrated approach. The decision to include transitional needs in the CAP clearly represents a step forward. At the same time, it is clear that the CAP is defined as an instrument serving humanitarian purposes and that it should remain so. In a wider perspective, an important and challenging aspect of CAP preparation might well be coordination with other developmental coordination instruments, as recognized in the resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council.

To address the challenges in connection with transition, there is a need for new approaches. In that regard, the initiative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, with the participation of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, on reintegration of refugees in post-conflict situations is commendable. New initiatives to link relief assistance to refugees with long-term development goals are essential to enable refugees to be real agents of development and positive change. Better coordination between development actors is important in that regard.

Another coordination tool at the disposal of OCHA is the Emergency Revolving Fund. The European Union is pleased to note recent progress in the use of the Fund. We agree that further steps to expand its use are not warranted at this stage.

Sometimes, there may be a need to draw upon military and civil defence resources in the implementation of humanitarian and relief assistance. We support ongoing efforts to establish clear guidelines for the use of military and civil defence assets to support United Nations humanitarian activities in complex emergencies.

Advocacy is also an important aspect of the work of OCHA. That goes for the general role of OCHA. There is a clear need for a coherent advocacy and public information strategy in relation to the CAP, including the use of decentralized CAP launches. But OCHA also has a more specific advocacy role in relation to the most vulnerable.

OCHA must ensure that necessary attention is given to internally displaced persons who often find themselves in extremely vulnerable situations. Further work to promote the responsibility and accountability of all concerned actors, including the operational agencies, is called for. An important supportive role is envisaged for the special unit for internally displaced persons, which has recently been established within OCHA. Continued emphasis should be placed on the dissemination and implementation of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, as developed by the Secretary-General's Representative on Internally Displaced Persons.

OCHA is also well placed to serve as the system-wide catalyst for concerns pertaining to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. That includes the provision of information and advice to the Security Council and such Secretariat departments as the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Political Affairs. More generally, it is important that OCHA work to increase awareness of those issues in relation to a wide area of constituencies, including agency partners, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

The allegations made one year ago about the widespread sexual abuse of refugees in West Africa gave rise to considerable concern. We have studied with interest the recommendations contained in the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. To avoid the risk of sexual abuse in the future, it is essential to ensure that the right conclusions are drawn and proper measures taken. Important guidance is

provided by the plan of action prepared by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee task force addressing a number of prevention, response management and implementation issues. The European Union will closely monitor the translation of the plan of action into the operational and managerial frameworks of the agencies involved. We welcome the elaboration by UNHCR of a specific code of conduct with a view to preventing future abuse.

There is general agreement today about the importance of stepping up efforts in the area of prevention and mitigation of national disasters. Progress is being made, although maybe not as fast as might be hoped for. Small, but important steps forward were made at this year's session of the Economic and Social Council.

The secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction is playing an important role in the context of efforts to increase awareness of the devastating impact natural disasters can have on already vulnerable societies. The EU supports the Secretariat's preventive approach aimed at building more disaster-resilient communities at all levels. We also wish to underline the need for coherence and complementarity in relation to other United Nations actors and the World Bank.

The need for the development of standards for emergency humanitarian response is widely recognized. We welcome the initiative that has led to the proposal of a draft resolution on strengthening international urban search-and-rescue assistance.

The European Union plays a prominent role in international efforts to relieve humanitarian needs everywhere in the world. Overall, the European Union supplies about 50 per cent of global humanitarian assistance. In 2001, EU member States supplied over €1 billion. In addition to the contributions of the member States, the European Commission, through its Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), allocated in 2001 a total of over €500 million to fund humanitarian projects in more than 60 countries. In 2001, significant progress was made in defining more clearly the relationship between ECHO and its United Nations partners. In concrete terms, ECHO funding channelled through United Nations agencies was significantly higher in 2001 than in the previous year.

Over the years, OCHA has done much to increase the efficiency and coherence of international humanitarian work and to facilitate the transition from relief to development. The efforts of the Office have enjoyed the support of the European Union. We wish to assure Mr. Oshima of our continued support and readiness to engage in constructive dialogue with the Office and with other States Members of the United Nations on ways to improve coordination and other relevant issues concerning international humanitarian activities.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, allow me to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and detailed reports on various aspects of strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

The nature and extent of humanitarian situations have changed dramatically and new dimensions have emerged during the last decade. The international community is still striving to address these emergencies in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. An increasing number of people are suffering from natural disasters, the extent and frequency of which have eroded the capacity to address them and hindered the development of disaster-stricken countries. Humanitarian emergencies are also increasingly produced by domestic armed conflicts and the displacement as well as targeting of innocent civilians that are associated with this tragic phenomenon.

In my statement, I will try to focus on some aspects of the issues before us. Natural disasters and complex emergency situations occur mostly in the developing world. More than 90 per cent of the victims of disasters and emergencies live in the South. This indicates that these phenomena are associated with a low level of development or with a general state of underdevelopment in these societies. Poverty in all its aspects — including the lack or serious weakness of institutions, which restrains the ability of developing countries to address various economic and social challenges — intensifies the adverse impact of such emergencies. Therefore, the establishment and strengthening of the necessary socio-economic institutions and capacity-building at the national level are crucial for the prevention or the reduction of the adverse impacts of such emergencies and should become major components of a comprehensive strategy. Regional approaches should also be considered as a major complementary component of

such a strategy, depending on the nature of the disaster or emergency.

Furthermore, the preparation of contingency planning and preparedness among members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee should go beyond integration, and possibilities for common planning should also be explored to prevent parallel activities and overlaps among various agencies. This approach can also support the other main planning process, such as the Common Humanitarian Action Plan. The establishment of the United Nations Joint Logistics Centre and humanitarian information centres has proved to be extremely useful. Such arrangements at the field level should be coordinated with national assets and institutions to benefit from their capabilities as well.

While addressing this issue, let me also underline the importance of the role of national as well as local institutions and structures in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. As the Secretary-General indicated in his report, it is crucial to make sure that, in the process of assistance, the existing national and local coping mechanisms are not destroyed or weakened. Rather, there should be a clear policy approach to strengthen and utilize them for the coordination and distribution of assistance and to enable them to participate in the transition from relief to development.

The primary responsibility for the protection of and assistance to the civilian population lies with the national Governments of affected States, and the international community has an important role in assisting the efforts of affected countries. However, in cases in which Governments lack the necessary institutions and structures to meet their responsibilities or in which territories within a country are under factional domination, the international community should intervene and assume responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance and protecting civilians, particularly vulnerable groups. In such extreme cases, the United Nations, as the sole legitimate body, should be in charge of coordinating humanitarian affairs, providing necessary support and protection with its humanitarian partners and preventing confusion among various humanitarian actors that could endanger the overall humanitarian operations.

Such an enormous task should be carried out in line with the United Nations Charter and other relevant international law and human rights instruments, as well as with the key humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality. The disturbing allegations of abuse by humanitarian workers highlights the importance of monitoring the activities of various humanitarian players and their personnel by relevant bodies of the United Nations to ensure the protection of vulnerable groups, including women and children, in emergencies.

There have been some developments in the area of addressing the challenges posed by internally displaced persons. We acknowledge the extensive utilization of Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement by various United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors, and we welcome the establishment of the Inter-agency Unit on Internal Displacement in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The Unit should ensure a predictable and concerted approach among all concerned actors to the problems of internal displacement in improving the quality and efficiency of field protection interventions. It should also focus on strengthening the support of the international community for the affected States in their endeavours to provide protection and assistance to their internally displaced persons.

Consolidated appeals planning as a strategic coordination, planning and advocacy tool has been improving during the last decade. Many of the changes made have been requested by the donors. Nonetheless, the results have been disappointing, and there has been a steady decline in the proportion of humanitarian assistance channelled through the consolidated appeals process. There are also major discrepancies in the funding of various emergencies, and even some large and catastrophic humanitarian crises have not captured the attention of donors. The proposed advocacy and public-information campaign for increasing the allocation of resources through the consolidated appeals process should not increase the transitional costs of such a process. It should also be done in a holistic manner and involve greater coordination among donors, participation of non-governmental organizations in the consolidated appeals components and in its planning process, a financial tracking system that better accounts for the totality and the sources of humanitarian expenditures, and, finally, the

establishment of a strong partnership with the media in order to ensure its success.

With respect to natural disasters, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, in 2001 more than 200 million people were affected by such disasters. Iran, one of the countries most prone to a variety of natural disasters, during the last three years has experienced severe earthquakes, droughts and flash floods. An effective response to natural disasters should encompass preventive measures, including early-warning systems and preparedness at the national and regional level.

The establishment of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group for the coordination and mobilization of specialized search and rescue teams is a positive step forward. It is imperative that in any further developments, including in the elaboration of guidelines for such operations, the relevant stakeholders, including civil society organizations, should be consulted. The incorporation of vulnerability reduction and risk analysis in development planning at the local, national and international levels will strengthen preventive measures for addressing natural disasters.

Cooperation, collaboration and the establishment of partnerships among major and competent players from both the North and the South should contribute enormously to preventing or reducing the adverse impact of natural disasters. Such players include academicians, research institutions and business associations or other grass-roots organizations in the construction sector or other relevant sectors.

The establishment of a networking process in order to exchange experiences and best practices among these groups, with the goal of preventing or reducing the adverse impact of natural disasters, including through existing information technologies, should be high on our agenda. Cooperation and networking among insurance companies or other relevant financial institutions to address natural disasters and their impact could also help such institutions in the developing world to develop innovative policies and schemes in this respect. I am quite confident that the relevant United Nations bodies could play a very positive role in such an approach.

In brief, I believe that, in order to ensure the incorporation of vulnerability reduction and risk analysis in development planning, it is imperative to mobilize a strong constituency, such as one consisting of the aforementioned players, in order to follow up these issues very vigorously; to ensure that these measures will become codes of conduct and rules and regulations in relevant sectors of the economy; and also vigilantly to follow up their implementation and monitor their results.

Mr. De Rivero (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Given that, following the cold war, more than 30 civil wars have broken out and that there are now more than 12 million refugees and 25 million displaced persons, it has become very clear that the institutional capacity of the United Nations is not sufficient to prevent internal conflicts, and that we are facing a humanitarian challenge of considerable magnitude.

For these reasons, the delegation of Peru supports all of the efforts made by the United Nations to promote a culture of conflict prevention, because conflicts are the cause of so much human suffering. However, we must recognize that this culture of conflict prevention is still academic, and that what we are facing is a proliferation of civil conflicts that the United Nations was not created to address.

The inability of the United Nations to prevent internal civil conflicts and to restore peace has given increased importance to humanitarian work, which is now one of the main tasks of this Organization. Hence the United Nations has gone from being a body established for peace to a humanitarian body.

This is the reality in which we live at the beginning of the twenty-first century. For this reason, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has become an indispensable United Nations mechanism to which we must provide our full support, so that it can increase humanitarian assistance and continue to coordinate ever more effectively the provision of assistance to the civilian victims of internal clashes that this Organization has not been able to prevent and which have proliferated in all the poor regions of the world, formerly known as the Third World.

For these reasons, my delegation continues to share the growing concern at the difficulties faced in the consolidated appeals process, which have been reflected in insufficient financial commitments on the part of the donor community. This has made it difficult to respond effectively to the numerous international humanitarian crises.

Today entire peoples — particularly women, children and the elderly — whose States cannot assist them depend on the support of the international community. We cannot allow inaction, or what is known as humanitarian cooperation fatigue, to lead to death and desperation for thousands of innocent victims.

Peru, like many countries of South America, is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. Peru is therefore greatly concerned about the increase in the number and intensity of natural disasters, which, it has been proved, are caused to a great extent by human activity. Today, after some 200 years of industrial revolution, nature has returned with a vengeance through climate change. This is particularly evident in the increasing frequency and magnitude of the El Niño phenomenon, the continuing glacial recession in the Andes, the Alps and the Himalayas, and the growing number of floods, droughts and forest fires.

As the Secretary-General has recalled, in recent years the number of people affected by natural disasters has grown, as have the economic consequences of such disasters. Indeed, 25,000 people died as a result of the 700 disasters recorded in 2001 alone, while the economic losses relating directly to such disasters amounted to $36 billion. Furthermore, more than 100 million people are suffering from the effects of drought. It has been estimated that, if such trends continue, by 2050 some 100,000 lives could be lost every year as a result of so-called natural disasters, with the average annual cost amounting to approximately $300 billion. That figure is six times greater than the total amount of official development assistance that developing countries are currently receiving.

As a result, the United Nations must urgently strengthen its capacity to respond rapidly and effectively to natural disasters through, for example, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team, which carries out damage and needs assessment activities. Decisive measures must also be taken to continue to strengthen the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction.

The United Nations must be particularly innovative when dealing with natural disasters. It must also endeavour to establish an arrangement with transnational corporations whereby they can participate by providing resources and teams in the case of large-scale natural disasters. I have no doubt that many transnational corporations would be prepared to cooperate with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on natural disasters. Why not therefore attempt to set up a cooperative arrangement with such corporations?

But more can be done. Peru is firmly convinced that we must pay urgent attention to the causes of most natural disasters, which are neither natural nor the product of divine fury. Rather, they are the result of the globalization of rapid urban demographic growth whose patterns of production and consumption are unsustainable. Empirical evidence shows us that our urbanized patterns of production and consumption, based on fossil fuels, have distorted climate patterns and intensified so-called natural disasters. Today, 55 per cent of so-called natural disasters are hydro-meteorological in nature — the consequences of rainfall, floods, landslides, drought, desertification, hurricanes or the El Niño phenomenon. Only 15 per cent result from earthquakes or volcanic eruptions, which are properly identified as natural disasters.

The evidence is such that the recent Political Declaration adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development recognized that the adverse effects of climate change are clear, that the number and devastating character of such natural disasters is increasing and that the developing countries are the most vulnerable of all. For that reason, Peru firmly supports the prompt entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, and recognizes the need to continue to work to develop mechanisms to limit the production and consumption of gases that cause climate change.

In this context, during this session my delegation is promoting a draft resolution in the Second Committee which, for the first time, acknowledges the link between climate change and natural disasters. Consequently, the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change should consider the question of natural disasters and the vulnerability of developing countries with a view to reducing the causes of climate change by controlling gas emissions resulting from the combustion of fossil fuel.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the draft resolution aimed at strengthening the effectiveness and the coordination of assistance in urban search and

rescue, which Turkey has been promoting and which Peru will co-sponsor. This draft resolution highlights the importance of increasing the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and sets forth the basic principles included in the guidelines provided by the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, such as the simplification of customs and administrative procedures in the affected countries and the strengthening of cooperation at the international, regional and subregional levels. We must provide every possible facility for such assistance, which is of vital importance to the States most vulnerable to natural disasters.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of Egypt would like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports under consideration in the General Assembly today. We would also like to express our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Kenzo Oshima for the positive impetus that he has given to the humanitarian sector of the Secretariat since taking up his post.

I would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the Secretary-General, to the humanitarian assistance team and to the Government of the United Kingdom for the killing, by Israeli forces' bullets last Friday, of a staff member of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, who had been entrusted with the work of reconstructing the Jenin refugee camp.

Egypt would like to take this opportunity to emphasize its belief that a firm position should be taken in dealing with threats or violence to, and the detention and murder of, all humanitarian assistance personnel anywhere in the world. All such practices are condemned by international law and their perpetrators are held accountable. In fact, the statute of the International Criminal Court has included such violations as war crimes that fall within its jurisdiction. Egypt reiterates its demands to all parties in armed conflicts to respect the rights of personnel operating in the humanitarian assistance field and to ensure their safety and security. We would like to emphasize that violation of those rights is a serious matter and constitutes a breach of international law.

Egypt believes that the provision of humanitarian assistance to deal with the consequences of natural and man-made disasters is an indispensable, noble activity. We consider supporting that assistance and enhancing its effectiveness a duty of the international community as it acts through the United Nations system to address natural disasters and the consequences and implications of wars, whether they are between States or internal conflicts.

Such disasters and wars have claimed high tolls in human lives and caused great destruction of infrastructure. They have adversely affected development efforts in countries and have resulted in unprecedented levels of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Egypt supports, in principle, the call by the Secretary-General to promote the culture of protection and demands that extensive international consultations be undertaken to define the exact meaning of this important concept and to determine the modalities for putting it into effect, while respecting the mandates of the main organs of the United Nations.

The United Nations has advocated in recent years the promotion of a culture of peace and prevention. We must, however, ensure that such diverse cultures would engage the support of the international community for a better future for humanity.

These concepts must be addressed in a way that moves them from abstract cultures to practices established by international consensus. The delegation of Egypt reiterates its appeal to the international community to intervene to counter the humanitarian catastrophe that the Palestinian people are undergoing as a result of grave and unprecedented Israeli practices. The international community must intervene to provide assistance to this unarmed people and to salvage the peace process in the Middle East. These Israeli practices have led to a humanitarian disaster in Palestinian territories and to a total collapse of the political, economic, humanitarian and environmental structures.

There has been an attempt to intimidate the Palestinian people whose only request is to enjoy its natural right to independence, freedom, the implementation of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the norms established at the Madrid Peace Conference and the land-for-peace formula. Egypt would like to emphasize that a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, a peace based on equal rights to security and respect for United Nations resolutions, is the only guarantee for the future of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples alike. We must

put an end to the bloodbath afflicting the civilian population on both sides.

Egypt appreciates the positive role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as this agency provides assistance to about four million Palestinian refugees. Egypt would like to express its thanks and appreciation to all organs and institutions that provide humanitarian relief assistance to the Palestinian people. Egypt also calls on donor countries to step up their efforts to provide the necessary financing and aid to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. We also ask those donor countries to take firm positions against any practices that would block the delivery of this assistance to those who need it.

Egypt calls upon the Secretariat to include in the report of the Secretary-General to be submitted to the General Assembly and the United Nations Economic and Social Council next year an in-depth analysis of the efforts of the United Nations to tackle the humanitarian situation in the occupied territories and the difficulties it faces there. The Secretariat should propose solutions for overcoming these difficulties in order to allow the General Assembly and the Council to adopt the appropriate resolutions in this regard. Moreover, Egypt calls upon the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to coordinate its efforts with UNRWA aimed at following up on the conditions of Palestinians under Israeli occupation, both refugees and non-refugees, as they form an integral part of the civilians that need humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Escanero (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Humanitarian assistance is one of the most noble expressions of solidarity in the face of the challenges that we are facing in nature worldwide and in emergency situations created because of the persistence of and increase in conflict. It is a complex task that requires clear and well defined rules to guide the international community in its response. We reaffirm the relevance of the guiding principles for the provision of humanitarian assistance adopted by this General Assembly in resolution 46/182. States have the prime responsibility for initiating, organizing, coordinating and implementing humanitarian assistance in their territory.

Assistance must be provided with humanity, neutrality and impartiality and in accordance with the United Nations Charter. Assistance must be provided only with the consent of the receiving State.

The report of the Secretary-General on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development, proves once again that there has been an increase in the occurrence and the effect of natural disasters. Statistics show that in the last ten years of the twentieth century there was a real increase in number of windstorms, earthquakes and droughts.

Climate change due to human activity has contributed to an increase in natural disasters. Communities in many countries, particularly those in developing countries, have been increasingly exposed to the risks of natural disasters.

The Secretary-General's report places emphasis on the need to develop the capacity to respond to natural disasters and recommends that a similar effort be provided in the area of risk reduction. Vulnerability to natural disasters has increased and has placed serious limits on the achievement of the Millennium Goals, such as poverty reduction and environmental protection.

Sustainable development is the most effective dissuasive measure against conflicts and the best defence against the forces of nature, because it allows States to have a greater capacity to respond, to coordinate and to use resources to face disasters effectively.

Mexico is, therefore, convinced that emergency humanitarian assistance must support overall recovery with a long-term vision and within the framework of a genuine culture to have sustained prevention in the area of disasters and to promote development.

Following the initial relief phase, cooperation and international support should be provided with the same level of intensity for rehabilitation and reconstruction. The rehabilitation phase must be seen as an opportunity to restructure and improve installations destroyed and services interrupted as a result of natural disasters. It must also provide an opportunity to establish measures to reduce vulnerability in order to reduce loss of material and human life in future natural disasters. It must also contribute to setting communities on the path of sustainable development.

We reiterate our conviction in the fundamental role of the United Nations to assume a leadership role

to coordinate the efforts of the international community in providing assistance to countries affected by natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies, based on the priorities established by the authorities of the affected countries themselves. We, therefore, insist on the importance of strengthening communication between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs with the Member States of the Organization and other relevant United Nations system entities, as well as with other humanitarian organizations.

We need to have sufficient resources to respond effectively to humanitarian assistance requirements as a result of a crisis in affected nations. Such resources must not be made conditional on political considerations or interests that are foreign to the principles of humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian assistance is a shared responsibility and a collective commitment. The deployment of assistance must go hand in hand with the provisions of international law, a framework for action and conduct that we have agreed upon and the promotion of solidarity among peoples and nations. These are, and continue to be, the cornerstones of Mexico's contribution to this cause shouldered by the United Nations.

Mr. Staehelin (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The coordination of United Nations emergency humanitarian assistance for victims of armed conflicts, crises and disasters has been discussed by the General Assembly for over 10 years. Similarly, the creation of a humanitarian segment within the Economic and Social Council yearly substantive session has allowed us to move towards a common understanding of what is at stake and the major challenges we face in the context of emergency assistance.

The experience of the last decade has clearly indicated the need to constantly reaffirm the fundamental principles of humanitarian action, notably its neutral and impartial characteristics. Switzerland is convinced that, in order for humanitarian action to preserve its credibility and efficiency, it must proceed in a manner distinct from the political dynamic.

Furthermore, Switzerland encourages the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to pursue and strengthen its efforts to provide information to the principal United Nations organs regarding emergency situations, as well as all Member States, particularly those countries affected by such situations and the donor countries.

Referring more specifically to the Secretary-General's note relating to the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) (document A/57/613), we align ourselves with the recommendations contained therein. My delegation favours the use of CERF in response to natural disasters. We should like to recall here, however, that when it comes to natural or technological risks, our efforts should prioritize prevention programmes aimed at sustainably improving the status of individual preparedness, and that of vulnerable populations at the national, regional and international levels.

As concerns the question of "forgotten conflicts", we call upon donors to devote more attention to these situations. We, furthermore, call upon the Emergency Relief Coordinator to take advantage, at its upcoming meetings, of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which constitutes a unique platform for consultation and decision-making for humanitarian agencies, both within and outside the United Nations system. My authorities are of the opinion that the IASC should play a more strategic role in the future.

Switzerland will continue to pay particular attention to the coordination and consistency of humanitarian action, within the United Nations system and equally among other humanitarian actors as a whole. We are, furthermore, pleased with the imminent adoption of a resolution at this session of the General Assembly, which deals with emergency international assistance deployed in the context of the International Urban Search and Rescue initiative, which bears witness to the relevance and topicality of this question.

A few days ago, the United Nations Consolidated Emergency Appeal for 2003 was launched in different venues around the globe. Switzerland was honoured by the Deputy Secretary-General's presence at the event in Bern, as well as by the participation of, among other eminent personalities, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

This allowed us to assess the extent of the needs, geographically as well as sectorally. It took considerable work to improve the quality of the various consolidated appeal processes, particularly in the field where humanitarian programmes are planned on the basis of common priorities and strategies, in

consultation with the authorities of the countries concerned. The progress is encouraging, but there remains much to accomplish in order to ensure a response adapted to the needs of people touched by crises, conflicts or disasters.

In the Secretary-General's report (A/57/77), importance was attributed to the transition from the relief phase to that of development. Specifically, sustained coordination efforts must be undertaken by all partners involved in order to link the Consolidated Appeal Process, the Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the strategic intervention frameworks of international financial institutions, including the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

Switzerland fully agrees with the Secretary-General's intention to promote a culture of protection that comprises promoting and respecting international humanitarian law, taking into consideration the specific needs of vulnerable groups, ensuring the security of humanitarian personnel and prohibiting the illicit exploitation of natural resources, among other measures. As far as respect for international humanitarian law is concerned, it should be recalled here that that responsibility belongs, on the one hand, to States, which are the principal guarantors of protection, and, on the other, to armed groups, which are required to scrupulously respect the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law. Switzerland, as a State party to and the depositary of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, is actively committed to the dissemination of and respect for international humanitarian law. It strives to promote awareness of and respect for this field of law by armed non-State actors. Furthermore, Switzerland invites all States that have not yet done so to ratify the Additional Protocols.

With regard to vulnerable groups, we note that, over the past decade, the civilian population has paid and continues to pay the highest price as a result of conflicts. Here, we should like to reaffirm the cardinal importance of the impartiality of humanitarian aid. Moreover, the massive displacement of populations causes many destabilizing effects for such persons and for the host populations. In that respect, we think that the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement provide adequate responses to the needs of the affected persons, and we encourage concerned Governments to implement the Guiding Principles.

Concerning humanitarian personnel, we wish to pay tribute to the commitment and devotion of all the men and women who work in situations that are often precarious and dangerous. In fact, their working conditions are worrisome in many respects. Threats and even direct attacks are perpetrated, which frequently makes the presence of such organizations among victims impossible. In that regard, we stress the paramount importance of the rapid access of humanitarian personnel to vulnerable populations, without obstacles. Having said that, we should also like to remind those personnel — whether local or expatriate — that their behaviour towards the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid must be irreproachable.

In conclusion, the influence of the economic stakes in numerous conflicts or in crisis situations is equally important in our view. The criminalization of the economy through the exploitation of natural resources or the trafficking of drugs, weapons or, even worse, human beings, continues to feed many conflicts around the world. That fact deserves to be taken into account, both in analysing the causes of such conflicts and in searching for solutions to them.

We should like to add a more positive note by referring to the theme chosen for the launching of the United Nations Consolidated Appeals Process for 2003: "Hope for the Future". Our responsibility to present and future generations is summarized in those few words. The task is immense, but we owe it to ourselves to carry forth that message of hope, derived from humanitarian principles and from the universality of United Nations emergency assistance.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for your efforts in directing the deliberations of this session. I should also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his valuable and comprehensive report (A/57/77) on this item.

International reports indicate that the number of persons who need humanitarian and relief assistance as a result of natural disasters, armed conflicts and foreign occupation around the world exceeds 240 million, the majority of whom live in developing and poor countries. Moreover, and also a cause for concern, the need for humanitarian aid is expected to increase in the

coming years as a result of ongoing climatic change and the persistence of armed conflicts and wars.

Guided by the directives of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, President of the State, the United Arab Emirates has, since its establishment, continued to provide emergency relief assistance and long-term development aid to developing countries through regional partnerships and specialized national bodies. In that context, I should like to cite a number of examples of the humanitarian and relief assistance that our country has provided to many friendly and sisterly countries affected by natural disasters, conflicts and wars.

The Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates has spent nearly $35 million in the past two years on humanitarian and relief assistance activities in many nations affected by natural disasters and wars, such as Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kosovo, Macedonia, Lebanon, Algeria, the Sudan, India, Somalia and the Czech Republic. In the light of such contributions, the Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates has been ranked as first among Arab charitable organizations and as one of the seven best charitable societies in the world.

Through the Abu Dhabi Fund for Arab Economic Development the Government of the United Arab Emirates has provided financial grants and soft loans to 55 developing and poor countries for long-term development projects such as the construction of dams, electric power stations, the expansion of seaports, orphanages, roads, schools, universities and neighbourhood housing projects, in addition to financial contributions aimed at supporting and strengthening the activities of United Nations organizations and agencies working in the humanitarian assistance field.

The Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation has undertaken many effective initiatives and has carried out significant activities related to humanitarian projects at the local and international levels. For that reason, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ranked the Foundation fifth among all bodies worldwide that provide relief and emergency assistance for refugees. The Foundation's activities have included relief assistance to disaster-stricken areas and financing to charitable humanitarian projects in many Asian, African and European countries.

The United Arab Emirates is deeply concerned about the suffering of the Palestinian people, who have lost their properties and livelihoods and have been subjected to displacement, abject poverty and serious diseases as a result of continuing Israeli aggression and crimes, which have had a devastating impact on the Palestinian economy. The United Arab Emirates has continued to provide special immediate humanitarian aid as well as long-term development assistance to the Palestinians throughout their years of hardship to alleviate their suffering and to support them in their strife against the brutal Israeli aggression.

Those are a few examples of Government and individual humanitarian assistance initiatives.

As part of the efforts of the Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates to mitigate the humanitarian and economic crisis in Palestine, it spent $52 million during the last year and a half on various humanitarian projects such as reconstruction of the Jenin refugee camp, which was totally demolished by the occupying Israeli forces, refurbishment of the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Nativity and building or reconstruction of schools, hospitals, mosques and churches in many cities in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Government of the United Arab Emirates contributed $50 million to the project of the Sheikh Zayed residential city in Gaza. It also financed the construction of the Sheikh Zayed hospital in Ramallah, which will help alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people and generate employment opportunities for thousands of Palestinians who lost their sources of income as a result of the policies of destruction and suppression implemented by the occupying forces in Palestinian cities and villages. Furthermore, the United Arab Emirates has also donated $500,000 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to enable the Agency to fulfil its commitments to the Palestinian refugees.

Our country's First Lady, Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, chairperson of the Women's Union and honorary chairperson of the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Society, has made a personal donation of $2 million for establishing a vocational rehabilitation centre and a charitable society for children in the occupied Palestinian territories. Her Highness was presented with a gold pin by the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees in recognition of her initiatives and generous donations to refugees, in particular, her initiative to establish a refugee fund for women.

In that context, the United Arab Emirates condemns the Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, which intentionally impeded the staff of United Nations humanitarian agencies from providing the necessary relief assistance to the Palestinian people. My country calls for the intervention of the international community to protect the Palestinian people from Israeli aggression and massacres. We further request Israel to immediately halt its attacks and crimes against the Palestinians, to end its policy of internal closures and blockades in Palestinian cities and to allow United Nations humanitarian organizations and their respective agencies to deliver the necessary aid to needy people in Palestine, in accordance with international laws and treaties, in particular, the Fourth Geneva Convention. We also urge donor countries and relevant international financial organizations to increase funding for, and to improve the quality of, the humanitarian aid provided to the Palestinian people in order to save them from such a humanitarian catastrophe, which is in violation of human conscience and of all humanitarian and international laws.

While the United Arab Emirates commends the efforts of the United Nations to provide humanitarian and relief assistance to countries and peoples in post-conflict and natural disaster situations, it stresses the importance of international partnerships in strengthening and coordinating such assistance within an immediate and long-term development strategy framework, based on the following principles: to assist developing and poor countries, as well as countries in post-conflict situations, in establishing systems for responding effectively to disasters and for building national capacity to better respond to disasters; to provide unconditional financial and developmental assistance to developing and poor countries and to facilitate their access to advanced technology, so that they can deal with disasters with minimum losses; and to strengthen international humanitarian law and human rights treaties in order to eliminate causes of armed conflicts and wars, such as foreign occupation, racial discrimination and repeated violations of human rights, which lead to violence and hinder development.

Mr. Gopinathan (India): We thank the Secretary-General for the reports which have been submitted under this agenda item. We have found these reports useful.

We note from the reports that the disturbing upward trend in the occurrence and impact of natural disasters continues unbroken. There is, however, a decline in the resources available in relation to the levels of need. The proportion of humanitarian assistance channelled through the Consolidated Appeals Process has also decreased over the years. In its substantive session this year, the Economic and Social Council noted with concern that while the Consolidated Appeals Process remains one of the most significant mechanisms for humanitarian resource mobilization, it has consistently suffered shortfalls. The Economic and Social Council also encouraged the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to continue to examine in greater depth the reasons for this disturbing trend and its implications. The examination will be important, and we hope it will allow us to constructively examine this issue of common concern.

The Secretary-General points out in his report — correctly in our view — that the vulnerability of societies to natural disasters poses a major threat to sustainable development. The clear linkage that the report draws between poverty and vulnerability to natural disasters is also completely valid. My delegation has therefore often made the point that development assistance, in the long term, reduces the need for emergency humanitarian assistance. It has highlighted the importance of drawing a distinction between natural hazards and natural disasters. Drought is a natural hazard and, therefore, unavoidable. It need not, however, inevitably lead to disaster. Famine can be avoided through long-term development assistance, which will make the socio-economic system resilient to the impact of natural disasters. That would truly be a culture of prevention.

We note the interest which seems to exist for addressing the gap between relief and development. We agree with the assertion in the report of the Secretary General that

> "without any significant increase in humanitarian funding, transitional activities will need to draw on money from traditional development budgets. Donors are urged to find

> better ways of accessing these resources, perhaps funnelling them through the consolidated appeals process". (*A/57/77, para. 69*)

A similar conclusion was also contained in the report of the High-Level Panel on Financing for Development.

We note in the Secretary-General's report that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is taking the lead in the development of international disaster response law. The report states that this

> "will provide a legal framework, based on existing hard and soft law, covering situations of natural and technological disaster and incorporating a right to security from natural and technological disasters". (*Ibid. para. 23*)

The idea of a right to security from natural and technological disasters needs further study and exploration, particularly with regard to its enforceability and obligations. We are of the view that this process would benefit from intergovernmental oversight, particularly with regard to its principles, scope and objectives. We would look forward to an opportunity for providing such oversight through an appropriate intergovernmental mechanism in the United Nations.

In his report, the Secretary-General refers to a "culture of protection". In our statement in the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, we shared with other Member States our understanding of that term. We will limit ourselves today to pointing out that this concept, variously known as the "responsibility to protect" or "humanitarian intervention", has not found acceptance among the vast majority of the membership of the United Nations. The Secretary-General himself acknowledged that in his report to the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly on the work of the Organization. It is our understanding that the concept still does not find favour among the membership of the United Nations. Our perception in this regard has been guided by the discussions which have taken place in the Economic and Social Council and in the General Assembly. Further discussion of this subject would, in our view, be infructuous and would divert attention from issues which are of real concern to most Member States.

In his report, the Secretary-General refers to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as legal principles. We must again point out that those principles were not negotiated in an intergovernmental process, but were drafted by a team of technical experts and non-governmental organizations. This process does not qualify them to be referred to as legal principles. We note in that regard that in his report (A/57/77) the Secretary-General very rightly refers to the Unit on Internal Displacement as a non-operational entity. That qualification needs to be reiterated, as the Secretariat would otherwise be transgressing its mandate.

The report refers to the need to ensure that the humanitarian, human rights, political and development dimensions of an emergency are addressed in a coherent manner. It is important in that regard to also point to the need for maintaining the distinction among these different aspects of the work of the United Nations. That is crucial if the trust that the United Nations system enjoys in the field of humanitarian assistance is to be retained.

In conclusion, we would refer to the guiding principles for humanitarian assistance, which were so clearly outlined in section I of the annex to resolution 46/182. Those notably are those of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, with full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States. They also state that humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and on the basis of an appeal made by it. Those principles are valid and time-tested, and their continued application would contribute towards success in relieving pain and suffering.

Mr. Nikolaev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation positively assesses efforts to strengthen and improve the coordination mechanisms and tools used by the United Nations and its humanitarian partners in humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, particularly in the transition from emergency assistance to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development, as well as in complex emergency situations. Russia attaches great importance to international cooperation in the field of emergency humanitarian assistance, primarily under the auspices of the United Nations. We note with satisfaction that progress has been achieved in that area. We recognize the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and note its active and efficient participation in tackling a wide range of complex problems related

to the implementation of humanitarian operations, as well as to preparedness and early warning with respect to humanitarian crises.

Progress in attaining the priority goals of the Office in crafting policy, ensuring effective coordination of humanitarian operations and introducing humanitarian principles to international life is clearly evident. Those activities are being carried out in accordance with the basic principles of humanitarian assistance: neutrality, humanity, impartiality, the absence of political conditionality, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and providing assistance with the consent of the affected country and in accordance with international law and national legislation. Respect for and strict observance of those principles by all Member States are key prerequisites for the development and strengthening of international humanitarian cooperation.

Cutting-edge technologies are of increasing importance in supporting the international humanitarian community's efforts to prevent or mitigate the consequences of disasters. Activities in that field, we believe, could be further upgraded, first, by strengthening national early warning systems, enhancing international cooperation, promoting advanced search and rescue and other special technologies, ensuring effective exchange of experience and information, training personnel, and so forth.

We support the creation of a global emergency warning network aimed at better coordinating national search and rescue services with a view to defining the specialized roles of national participants in international rescue operations. The Secretary-General's report (A/57/77) presents balanced measures to strengthen mechanisms for contingency planning in emergency situations at the regional level, improving local management capacity to respond to natural disasters, increasing OCHA's presence in natural-disaster-prone regions. These proposals are in keeping with Russian approaches to strengthening international capacity to respond to national, regional and international emergencies.

We note with satisfaction the efforts aimed at raising the efficiency of the international urban search and rescue operations and activities of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group. We support the development of guidelines for international urban search and rescue operations and are ready to endorse the appropriate draft resolution.

The consolidated inter-agency appeals are the major coordination mechanisms for United Nations emergency assistance and enable us to formulate strategic contingency plans for emergency operations. We note tangible improvement in structuring the appeals' procedural aspects and format. In our view, the simultaneous launching of the appeals for 2001 proved effective. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has an important role in developing useful recommendations aimed at improving United Nations humanitarian response. Information on the substance and methods of the work of that body should be transparent to all Member States and should be systematically updated.

In addition to strengthening channels of multilateral humanitarian assistance, it is essential to take measures to strengthen coordination of the activities of bilateral donors within the framework of the appeals. We wish to emphasize in particular the interest of Russian actors in cooperating more actively with the relevant United Nations agencies and bodies, as well as with other donors.

Despite the extremely complex and sensitive character of the issue of internally displaced persons, the United Nations has managed to accumulate substantial experience in rendering humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons. We support the established international practice of assistance to internally displaced persons by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian agencies, which is reflected in detail in the Secretary-General's report. In that regard, we stress that agreement by States on the citizenship of internally displaced persons and endorsement by the United Nations bodies with competence in the field of protection and assistance for internally displaced persons remain vital preconditions for humanitarian operations.

Russia believes that the primary responsibility for providing protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons rests with national Governments. Legal protection of such persons should be based primarily on national legislation and existing international human rights instruments. International efforts should complement measures taken at the national level and should contribute to enhancing the

capacity of States in that context. At the same time, it is important to provide reliable access to vulnerable populations for the purpose of rendering humanitarian assistance and protection to them.

We commend efforts to render humanitarian assistance to the population of Afghanistan. We regard this as one of the international community's most important humanitarian undertakings. As the amount of assistance to Afghanistan is increased, it is important to ensure its maximum effectiveness, including through increased coordination of international efforts. In the context of these international efforts to assist Afghanistan, we believe that the strengthening of the central coordinating role of the United Nations in mobilizing and delivering international humanitarian assistance and in ensuring its integration into Afghanistan's reconstruction and development is of the highest relevance.

Members are aware that Russia is actively involved in the preparation and implementation of projects undertaken by the international humanitarian coalition to support Afghanistan. We successfully provide the means of transit of humanitarian cargoes and ensure the security of humanitarian personnel in border regions. The Ministry for Emergencies of the Russian Federation closely cooperates with humanitarian agencies, in particular with the World Food Programme, in delivering food assistance to Afghanistan. The Russian partners are offering their services in implementation of a number of projects in the sectors of transport infrastructure, health care and education in Afghanistan.

Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Colombia is participating with pleasure in the annual debate on United Nations humanitarian assistance and the means of strengthening its coordination to the benefit of millions of people throughout the world.

This year, as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 46/182, which serves as a benchmark for international cooperation, my delegation wishes to stress the relevant role played by the General Assembly. The Assembly is the only organ in which all States interested in this item come together on an equal footing, both as beneficiaries and as donors, along with international humanitarian organizations. The Assembly is and should continue to be the main forum for debate on humanitarian questions, without prejudice to the important coordinating role played by the Economic and Social Council.

The figures of 170 million people whose lives were affected by natural disasters in 2001, along with 25 million internally displaced persons and 12 million refugees requiring attention that year, are a dramatic reality which the Members of this Organization must face in a clear spirit of solidarity and altruism. This is particularly important because the vast majority of those individuals live in developing countries, closer to poverty, to the threat of natural disasters and to conflicts generated by human beings.

It is universally acknowledged that the responsibility for seeing to the basic assistance and protection needs of these persons lies with the country affected by a humanitarian emergency, which must be guided by its domestic legislation and the international legal commitments that it has undertaken. Hence, the improvement of humanitarian response in the future will depend, to a great extent, on adequate local and national capacities to respond to disasters and complex emergencies.

Mr. Kpotsra (Togo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The role of the international community is therefore complementary in nature and designed to support the activities of national authorities. My delegation thus wishes to comment on some of the areas in which the United Nations has been active and can contribute to strengthening national and local capacities.

I would refer first to the coordinating role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We recognize and value the role played by the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and by OCHA in assessing the magnitude of emergencies, coordinating the international response and implementing the Consolidated Appeal Process. We would stress in particular OCHA's important role as a forum for dialogue between the international community and Governments. In this regard, my delegation insists on the utility of States Members of the Organization being updated periodically on meetings, many of which are held in Geneva, of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), in which the representatives of non-governmental organizations may participate.

Secondly, the humanitarian sphere should be extended. Broadening the focus of United Nations humanitarian operations is a matter of great importance for all Members of the Organization. Ever since the adoption of resolution 46/182, and as a result of the increase of complex emergencies in the 1990s, we have seen an extension of the humanitarian sphere in two significant, although controversial dimensions.

The first dimension is that of basic assistance to provide for the needs of individuals and to protect and ensure respect for fundamental human rights. This approach recognizes that victims have rights, yet runs the risk of politicizing humanitarian assistance and targeting it in accordance with the preference of donors. We need to bear in mind that humanitarian assistance and humanitarian protection have separate channels for interaction and dialogue between countries and the international community. We must therefore respect and maintain the competences of the bodies entrusted with humanitarian assistance and with human rights.

A second dimension of the extension of the humanitarian sphere is that of dialogue with the parties to a conflict, in particular armed groups, in order to facilitate the access of humanitarian personnel to vulnerable populations. This approach promotes respect for universal norms of international humanitarian law and care for the most defenceless groups of society in remote areas of conflict. We therefore express our interest in the efforts of the IASC to draft a code of conduct for dialogue between humanitarian agencies and armed groups on improving access.

My third comment refers to attention to internally displaced persons. Attention to internally displaced persons is certainly another area in which the humanitarian aspect of United Nations operations has been extended, with the consent and cooperation of the country receiving assistance. I should therefore like to highlight this year's launching of the new Unit on Internal Displacement within OCHA and its mission to guide and improve the responses of various agencies to crises of internally displaced persons throughout the world. We feel that the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are a useful framework in conducting dialogue with the countries affected by this emergency, including my own.

In Colombia, the mass displacement of persons has been caused by the activities of armed groups attempting to terrorize an organized society and a democratically elected Government. In their confrontation with society, these armed groups ignore the basic norms of international humanitarian law and resort to pillage, extortion, kidnapping and intimidation of civilians. The Colombian State has responded with an open and transparent policy, in accordance with its international commitments, in order to protect affected citizens and to guarantee the exercise of democracy. This policy includes the participation of the displaced populations themselves in the search for solutions to their situation and relies on the support of various international organizations, in particular the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Development Programme. This policy covers action in five areas: the prevention of displacement, humanitarian attention, socio-economic recovery, protection for individuals and the strengthening of institutions.

My country recognizes the right of individuals in situations of forced displacement anywhere in the world to return voluntarily, in conditions of security and dignity, to their former places of residence, or, alternatively, to voluntary relocation anywhere else in their country. The international community should support this right in the context of a programme marking the transition from humanitarian assistance to socio-economic development.

Given current circumstances the Members of the United Nations must continue to support effective and well-coordinated management by the Organization of the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance. Global climate change has given rise to uncertain conditions and seemingly to a greater threat of natural disasters and to a change in precipitation and in food-production patterns, and it has led to great suffering for millions of inhabitants in the Horn of Africa and in the southern part of the continent.

Moreover, many of the violent conflicts of the past decade continue to rage. While new expressions of violence have emerged, such as international terrorism, which strikes at defenceless citizens and limits the exercise of civil liberties, certain conflicts seem to be headed towards a definitive solution, such as those in Angola, Afghanistan and Sierra Leone. The resulting tremendous humanitarian challenges involve the

repatriation of millions of refugees, assistance to millions of displaced persons who are just emerging from the remotest areas, and the disarmament of child soldiers, to mention but a few aspects.

In conclusion, I should like to invite representatives to consider the upcoming report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which he intends to submit to the Security Council this week and which will be the subject of a debate that is open to all Members during Colombia's presidency during the month of December.

Let me also pay tribute and express our admiration and appreciation to the humanitarian organizations and to their staff — though not all of their members have an unblemished record — for persevering in the face of great danger in many conflicts throughout the world, and for continuing to work with dedication in the service of humankind.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): Last week, the consolidated appeals for 2003 were launched here in New York and in a number of other cities around the world. In spite of the importance of the subject matter to so many of the world's inhabitants, the amount of work that goes into the preparation of these appeals, and the commendable efforts to market a broad launch, it would be an exaggeration to say that the event made headlines. To those of us who support the consolidated appeals process, this apparent lack of interest is not an encouraging sign.

One of the main reasons behind the consolidated appeals process was to raise awareness and thereby increase the amount of resources provided for humanitarian action. It is deeply regrettable that the total level of resources available for humanitarian purposes is, in fact, declining in proportion to the increasing levels of need. Moreover, according to the Secretary-General's excellent report, there is an inverse relationship between the considerable improvements made in the quality of the consolidated appeals and their success in attracting donor funding.

We risk coming to a point where many of those involved in the process will ask themselves whether it is worth the effort when the financial incentives fail to materialize. If it makes no difference to the beneficiaries either, why bother? In reality, if the consolidated appeals lose their "market share", they will lose their effectiveness as a tool for strategic planning and coordination. This would be a serious setback for the international cooperation efforts that many of us, including donors like Norway, have been emphasizing so strongly for years.

Admittedly, the quality of a specific consolidated appeal, either in and of itself or compared with that of other consolidated appeals, is rarely a decisive element in our funding allocations. Most likely, there are few cases in which a donor chooses to allocate funds to one emergency and not the other because one consolidated appeal is better than the other. The media visibility of a particular emergency is certainly a more influential factor in the competition for funds. In a democratic society with free media, it is only natural that decisions relating to the use of public funds are influenced by politicians' perception of public opinion that is created by media coverage. This phenomenon could have a positive effect on the general level of humanitarian funds. However, as donors, we cannot allow ourselves to be guided solely by the emergencies that the media put on the public agenda, or, for that matter, emergencies that demand our attention for other, more political reasons. This would be detrimental not only to the forgotten crises, but also to the longstanding efforts to create a multilateral system with an overall approach to humanitarian emergencies.

The Secretary-General's warning of a serious lack of donor cooperation should not be disregarded. To be sure, donor coordination has been emphasized in a high-profile emergency such as Afghanistan. But, of course, this is limited to the efforts in Afghanistan, and there is no attempt to coordinate those efforts with the requirements of other emergency situations. The underfunding of the consolidated appeals is a clear indication that the donors should balance their own funding priorities better with the agreed priority needs, both on an ad hoc basis and in general, through their participation in the governing bodies of humanitarian and development organizations. Moreover, we must stop, or preferably reverse, the unfortunate trend in the overall level of humanitarian assistance.

The Secretary-General stresses the importance of continually improving the humanitarian financial tracking system to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the totality of humanitarian needs and assistance flows. A global system of this kind would be an important achievement, particularly since non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seem to be gaining in "market share". We agree that non-governmental organizations should be brought more actively into the

consolidated appeals process. Norway, for one, will make an extra effort, through its funding practices, to encourage non-governmental organizations to coordinate their projects with the relevant consolidated appeals. Moreover, we will attempt to report more fully to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on NGO funding in this respect.

Another point that also has implications for the reporting and "market share" of the consolidated appeals is the fact that some donors, including Norway, have heeded the desire of international humanitarian organizations to receive unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions. To some extent, such contributions are broader than the relevant consolidated appeals and probably not fully credited to them. This apparent contradiction between two commendable goals merits closer examination, and so do the related reporting aspects.

The Secretary-General's report points out that consolidated appeals for countries that are in the process of transition have been the least funded. Norway hopes that this will improve as more donors introduce specific budgetary allocations for "gap" projects. Norway has had such allocations for almost a year, and we are in the process of evaluating our experience so far. Our main objective is to contribute to development and peace-building in countries that are seeking to resolve violent and deep-seated conflict.

We realize that it is also important to incorporate activities during the transition period that will reduce vulnerability to natural disasters, as pointed out in the Secretary-General's report on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development (A/57/578). This is imperative in view of the increased frequency of natural disasters. More attention must be paid to natural disaster preparedness.

In general, more emphasis should be placed on preventing crises and disasters from occurring, whether they are natural or man-made. As can be seen from the large number of cases in which humanitarian emergencies persist or even recur in the absence of progress towards durable solutions and prospects for a better future, remedial action usually requires more resources than does prevention. The transition period is one of the difficult phases that requires increased international attention.

Norway would like to take this opportunity to commend the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on its repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction initiative. We support the High Commissioner's approach to bridging the gap between repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction processes in order to promote durable solutions for refugees, address poverty reduction and help create good local governance. This approach, which is based on the fact that transition is more than an economic process and involves the participation of the local community, envisages a division of labour and coordination with other major actors, such as the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. Norway will encourage them to become involved in the pilot countries that have already been identified. We expect that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will be centrally involved, at least during the initial stages of the programmes, when humanitarian efforts are at the forefront.

I would like to close with a few words of appreciation and encouragement to OCHA. Although the Office often has to perform its difficult task under less than ideal conditions, it goes about it with a dedication, competence and responsiveness that command respect. It deserves more tangible rewards, such as an increased market share for the consolidated appeals process. Norway, for one, will make an extra effort in this respect. We look forward to cooperating even more closely with OCHA, and we are grateful to the Office for sharing its valuable insight and guidance.

Mr. Tesch (Australia): We would like at the outset to thank the Secretary-General and his staff for the useful reports prepared under this agenda item. Australia has consistently supported coordinated responses by the international community to emergency and relief situations. We note with concern that the scale and complexity of emergencies has increased in recent years. This has placed considerable pressure on all humanitarian response organizations and further highlighted the need for effective coordination between the relevant players.

Australia supports ongoing efforts by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to strengthen humanitarian coordination mechanisms, including the use of the consolidated appeals process (CAP) to assist

ongoing strategic planning and to help mobilize resources. We welcome the theme for the 2003 CAP launch — "Hope For The Future" — which emphasizes the importance of providing hope to communities ravaged by conflict and other crises. Australia was pleased to be one of the eight countries hosting the 2003 CAP launch on 20 November this year.

Australia is also pleased to see the emphasis in the Secretary-General's report on the issue of the transition from relief to long-term development. Australia's humanitarian programme strategy for 2002-2003, developed in response to the growing incidence of crises in the Asia-Pacific region, aims to reduce the traditional distinction between development and humanitarian assistance. We also recognize that the transition from emergency to recovery assistance requires a significant shift in approach. Participants in the retreat on the consolidated appeal process at Montreux in February of this year noted the complexity of the transition phase and stressed that the early involvement of donors is critical. We support the involvement of the United Nations Development Programme and other development agencies in the early stages of a crisis response, including the formation of a CAP, to ensure policy coherence and help integrate recovery programming and peace-building perspectives into emergency responses.

Australia warmly welcomes the emphasis in the report on the capacities of women to be agents for change rather than vulnerable groups or simply beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance. We are also pleased to see the recognition that much more needs to be done to reach women affected by crises and to actively support their own capacity to contribute to the response.

I would like now to turn now to the issue of Timor-Leste. Australia is committed to working with the international community to support Timor-Leste's reconstruction and development. Having contributed 17.44 million Australian dollars, Australia is the second-largest donor to the Consolidated Fund for Timor-Leste. In addition, Australia has a programme of bilateral assistance to Timor-Leste totalling $24 million Australian dollars this financial year. In May 2002, Australia pledged up to $24 million Australian dollars over three years for the transition support programme to assist in meeting the Government of Timor-Leste's recurrent cost-financing gap.

The United Nations has played a key role in Timor-Leste in the transition from an emergency period to the post-emergency development phase. While much has been achieved in Timor-Leste, significant challenges remain for the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISET) and other donors. Through UNMISET, the United Nations will continue to play an important role in maintaining social stability, in particular through the promotion of the rule of law, a transparent justice system and an effective police force.

Australia also encourages the United Nations, in providing technical assistance to Timor-Leste, to focus on building institutional and individual capacities. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) continue to have an important role to play in working with other donors to promote and facilitate sound fiscal management practices in Timor-Leste. The transition support programme will provide a useful tool for further improvement on Timor-Leste's public expenditure management. Australia also notes the need for close and effective coordination between UNMISET, the World Bank, the IMF and UNDP to ensure the potential benefits of technical assistance are maximized and sustainable. Effective and coordinated capacity-building by multilateral and bilateral donors will be central to the achievement of UNMISET' s mandate and a smooth withdrawal of the United Nations Mission.

It is deeply disturbing that this year' s report by the Secretary-General on safety and security of humanitarian and United Nations personnel records that of the 214 deaths of United Nations civilian staff through malicious acts in the past 10 years, only 22 perpetrators have been apprehended in relation to the deaths of 15 staff members and that, of these individuals, only nine have been sentenced. It is equally disturbing to note that, in many instances, the perpetrators are known to the relevant Member State, yet no action is taken. Responsibility for ensuring the safety of United Nations and humanitarian personnel rests first and foremost with the Governments within whose jurisdiction activities are taking place. Governments should recognize and respect the independence and impartiality of United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers and allow them to operate without threat or hindrance. Governments must denounce attacks against United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers, and take all measures to bring perpetrators of violence to justice.

Practical measures can be taken to improve the safety of United Nations personnel. Australia welcomes the initiatives undertaken by the Secretariat in the past year to strengthen security coordination for United Nations personnel. We look forward to further progress in this area. However, this alone is not sufficient. States must undertake practical measures to promote understanding and observance of international humanitarian law within their own communities — especially among military and security forces, but also in civilian populations. United Nations and humanitarian personnel must also be properly trained in their responsibilities. Building a spirit of partnership between international personnel and local governments and communities can also be a crucial ingredient in averting tensions and threats.

In addition to these practical measures, the legal framework for the protection of United Nations and associated personnel needs to be strengthened. It is for this reason that Australia is playing an active role in efforts to improve implementation of the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, and to revise that Convention to ensure that the protective regime which it provides covers all United Nations and associated personnel. Accordingly we welcome the adoption of resolution 57/28 on the scope of legal protection under the Convention. We must all work to improve the situation of United Nations personnel and humanitarian personnel, so that they are able to safely and effectively perform their crucial work.

Mrs. Barghouti (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like at the outset to express our gratitude and appreciation to the Secretary-General for the important report he has submitted regarding support to the Palestinian people, in document A/57/130. We also wish to convey our appreciation to Mr. Terje Larsen, Special Coordinator for Peace in the Middle East and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The report that I have just mentioned deals with a number of important issues— the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories as well as the grave impact of repressive and arbitrary policies and measures conducted by Israel against the Palestinian people. The report also covers the severe economic crisis that the Palestinian people are confronting. My delegation would like to make a few remarks about the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories as well as other important and relevant questions.

Since September 2000 and up to today, in the occupied Palestinian territories, including al-Quds, the economic, social, humanitarian, cultural and environmental situation has seriously deteriorated. Israel has decided to escalate its bloody campaign of aggression against the Palestinians, which has resulted since September 2000 until this day in more that 2,000 deaths and 35,000 injuries. Many of them are permanently handicapped and cannot lead normal lives. Moreover, more than one third of those wounded are children, under 18 years old. In addition to the dead and wounded, the Israeli occupying forces have bombed and demolished a number of public and private buildings and facilities. They have destroyed the infrastructure, trees, roads, running water and sewage systems in Palestinian towns and cities. They have struck at hydroelectric plants and media outlets, and have destroyed large numbers of homes and shelters. Thousands of Palestinians have been left homeless. Moreover, statistics from the World Bank and ESCWA show that the destruction wrought by the Israeli forces is estimated at about $3.0 to $4.1 billion between 1 October 2000 and 31 December 2001. The Secretary-General has summarized this tragic situation in his report:

(*spoke in English*)

> "... the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is characterized by a deepening economic crisis with growing humanitarian consequences. The Palestinian people are facing a threat of economic collapse and social destitution. Continued emergency economic and social assistance is needed, but this cannot be a substitute for a resumption of political dialogue and progress towards an agreed solution" (*A/57/130, para. 43*).

(*spoke in Arabic*)

As was mentioned in the report, the Israeli policy of siege and closures was the initial reason for the crisis, which has affected all economic sectors. It has led to a quasi-paralysis of the entire labour sectors. Moreover, restrictions were imposed on peoples' freedom of movement and trade between Palestinian towns and cities and between them and the outside world. This has had an impact on the Palestinian

economy and has brought about a decline in the gross domestic product and in the disposable income of Palestinians. Economic activity has declined to less then 20 per cent of its normal rate. Unemployment in the West Bank is over 50 per cent and in Gaza it is over 70 per cent. The number of people who live below the poverty line is estimated at more than 2 million. We have seen this in a number of resolutions and reports of the United Nations, including the reports submitted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Katherine Bertini, who said:

(*spoke in English*)

> "The crisis is primarily evidenced by rising levels of malnutrition among children, high levels of poverty and unemployment, deteriorating health conditions and an increasing exhaustion of the coping mechanisms that have allowed the Palestinian population to sustain itself since the situation started deteriorating in late September 2000."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

We thank Ms. Bertini for her support of the Palestinian people and, in particular, for the humanitarian assistance given.

The Israeli practices against the Palestinian people are in flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is up to the international community to ensure that Israel respects the provisions and texts of that Convention. Israel must respect the will of the international community and cease its aggression, destructive policies and racist colonialist occupation.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its particular thanks to our brothers in the Arab countries who have accepted some of the wounded, and who have provided emergency relief, especially medicines and medical supplies. Even more important is the substantial assistance rendered to the Palestinian Authority, to its structure and work and to the people of Palestine in general.

We also thank other friendly countries, in particular the European Union and Japan, for their humanitarian assistance and their support of our people in general. Again, our thanks and appreciation go to the donor countries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have provided humanitarian emergency assistance to the Palestinian people. We wish to reiterate the importance of seeing those donors, as well as the United Nations emergency relief system, continue to provide all types of support and humanitarian assistance to the besieged Palestinian people in order to alleviate its suffering and to improve its living conditions. Humanitarian assistance is needed until the occupation ceases, and until the Palestinian people enjoy their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and to an independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

It is obvious that the current crisis has its roots basically in continued illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It also has its roots in continuing Jewish colonialist expansionism and refusal to abide by conventions and agreements. This is in addition to threats against Christian and Muslim sacred places, all in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

In order to achieve just and comprehensive peace, security and stability for all countries in the region, the occupation must cease, and Israel must withdraw from all occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Likewise, Israel must withdraw from occupied Golan Heights and must recognize the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish an independent State with full sovereignty over the entire territory. Without any of the aforementioned, there can be no peace process — the peace process cannot advance — and we cannot talk about regional development or cooperative policies with Israel as the occupying Power.

We wish to reiterate the importance of the role of the United Nations in establishing a just and comprehensive peace in the region. This is based on the Organization's responsibility towards the Palestinian cause. We wish to insist on the importance of the role played by the United Nations in the area of assistance rendered to the Palestinian people, as well as the role played by the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Huang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his series of highly informative and analytical reports submitted under agenda item 21. We would like to make a few comments on the item.

As the Secretary-General has pointed out in his reports, challenges in the humanitarian sphere remain formidable. Along with the frequent occurrences of natural disasters and armed conflicts, the threat caused by the spread of HIV/AIDS virus is growing, and the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons is deteriorating. Humanitarian assistance is increasingly needed and the international community must strengthen its response capacity and mobilize greater resources to provide assistance and protection to vulnerable populations.

The Chinese delegation agrees with the Secretary-General's overall review of humanitarian aid activities in the 2001 to 2002 period, especially his analysis of the root causes of humanitarian crises. Past experience demonstrates that natural disasters in the traditional sense, as well as humanitarian crises under emergency humanitarian situations, have gone beyond the borders of one State and have increasingly reached regional proportions. Therefore, strengthening regional response mechanisms is just as important and urgent as is the development of national capacity.

The Chinese delegation believes that, in providing humanitarian assistance, the United Nations and the international community must, throughout the process, abide strictly by the guiding principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and in General Assembly resolution 46/182, as well as the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, and respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States.

Humanitarian relief operations should be undertaken with the consent of, and on the basis of an appeal by, the affected countries. When assisting vulnerable populations that are victims of natural disasters and other emergency humanitarian situations, the United Nations and the international community should focus more on national capacity-building in the affected countries, so as to achieve a gradual transition from relief to development.

Protection and concern for specially affected groups, such as internally displaced persons, women, children, the elderly and the disabled, and the strengthening of their capacity to cope with crises, constitute a basis for humanitarian and relief efforts. The narrowing of the gap in funding during the process from relief to development is key to assisting vulnerable groups to complete the transition from relief to development.

The consolidated appeals process (CAP) as a tool for coordination, strategic planning and efficacy, plays an important role in the financing of humanitarian assistance. However, over the past decade, the proportion of humanitarian assistance resources channelled through the CAP process has declined, vis-à-vis the overall volume of humanitarian funding. There is quite a large gap between the overall volume of funds and the level of actual needs. The Chinese delegation is worried about this shortfall and hopes that efforts in this area will be further intensified.

The 2003 United Nations Inter-Agency Consolidated Appeal, jointly launched last week at United Nations Headquarters and at several other cities around the world, was a very good fund-raising event that was both highly necessary and timely. It was a publicity event that raised the visibility of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and helped draw greater attention on the part of the United Nations and the international community to humanitarian assistance activities. It also contributed to the mobilization of more resources for this purpose.

The Chinese thanks and appreciates OCHA under the leadership of Under-Secretary-General Oshima for the extensive efforts they have made in international humanitarian affairs. The Chinese Government enjoys a longstanding good cooperative relationship with OCHA. During his highly successful visit to China last summer, Mr. Oshima exchanged views with Chinese departments concerned on cooperation in the humanitarian field and discussed questions of concern to both sides.

As a disaster-prone developing country, China has received assistance from the United Nations and the international community. In the wake of the floods last summer, China again received attention and assistance from OCHA, for which we are deeply grateful.

China has also provided emergency humanitarian assistance throughout the years to many developing countries through bilateral channels. As always, China will continue to provide assistance to the best of its ability to other developing countries affected by disasters. China supports the Secretary-General's report on this item to provide special economic assistance to individual countries and regions.

Mr. Musambachime (Zambia): It is an honour for me to address the Assembly on this very important agenda item on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. This agenda item is pertinent in that it is being discussed at a time when the full extent of the humanitarian crisis is unfolding in the southern African region. This crisis, caused by a combination of natural and human factors, such as drought, floods and disease, has resulted in severe food shortages affecting an estimated 14 million people in the region.

It is in this regard that my delegation welcomes and commends the report of the Secretary-General, contained in document A/57/77-E/2002/63, which is timely and addresses the key concerns of the region. The causes and effects of humanitarian crises, as highlighted in the report, namely adverse weather conditions leading to severe floods and drought, armed conflict and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, have increased the vulnerability of the communities in the region and have eroded the capacities of Governments to prevent the recurrence of those calamities, thereby constraining development efforts.

In order to effectively address the humanitarian situation in the region, there is a need to employ a combination of mechanisms. In that regard, my delegation has taken note of the coordination mechanisms and tools adopted by the United Nations and humanitarian partners to address those emergencies. We welcome the recognition that, in order to address the regional effects of natural disasters and the resultant complex humanitarian emergencies, a holistic approach is required by the international community. We particularly welcome the initiative of United Nations bodies in actively strengthening their regional presence in many areas around the world that are vulnerable to natural disasters and other crises. Such an approach will ensure that the dimensions of a given emergency, namely humanitarian, human rights, political and developmental aspects, are coherently addressed.

Accessing vulnerable populations that have been affected by armed conflict and other humanitarian emergencies, in order to provide adequate protection and assistance to strengthen local capacities to cope with further crises, is a great challenge to the international community. My delegation is pleased that those issues have been thoroughly examined in the report of the Secretary-General. We also support his recommendation that particular efforts are required to strengthen assistance to specifically affected groups, such as internally displaced persons, children, women and the elderly. My delegation further agrees with the conclusions in the report that to ensure success, international support to humanitarian crises should be provided to the entire transition process, from relief to development. It must be understood that the intensity of risks and the impact of future hazards can be significantly reduced if development takes root. Most of our countries are doubly hit by those disasters, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure is weak and the provision of services is fragile or non-existent.

We welcome the idea of integrating disaster-risk assessment and a reduction strategy in the national and regional planning of all countries. Likewise, my delegation also supports the idea of better integrating disaster-risk management into the United Nations humanitarian and development planning process, such as the Consolidated Appeals Process, the common country assessment, and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework process.

I now wish to focus on the southern African region in general, and Zambia in particular, in order to give a regional perspective to the crisis and highlight some of the unique problems we face.

In my contribution to the previous debate on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations, I alluded to the food crisis in southern Africa caused by drought and floods, which have affected a large number of countries for three consecutive years. The food shortage has impacted negatively on extremely fragile societies and economies of the region. Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe are experiencing different degrees of severe food shortages as a consequence. All in all, it is estimated that 14.5 million people will be affected. The regional short-fall in terms of food requirements is about 4 million tons, of which 1.2 million is needed as emergency food aid.

With regard to my own country, Zambia, it should be understood that we are now in the second year of drought, with the southern part of the country, hitherto the most productive agricultural region, being the hardest hit. There has been an almost total crop failure and livestock have been decimated through lack of drinking water and grazing land. It is estimated that 2.3 million people will need emergency food assistance.

My Government recognizes the fact that adverse weather patterns in the region have become a persistent cycle over the years. In that regard, the Government has developed new measures and strategies to help deal with that problem on a long-term and permanent basis. Such strategies include the production of food crops such as winter maize, using irrigation during the dry season. In addition, the Government has strengthened good farming methods, agriculture expansion services to promote conservation farming, crop rotation and agricultural diversification. Those measures, though long-term in effect, are necessary to enhance national food security.

I wish, at this juncture, to take this opportunity to thank the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs and the World Food Programme, which have helped mobilize assistance for the drought-affected countries of southern Africa. Special thanks go to our cooperating partners for their timely response to this crisis. We request them to continue supporting our efforts in the form of finance, food and material assistance.

Though the report addresses the difficulties of accessing vulnerable populations within the context of protecting civilians in armed conflict, it does not clearly address the peculiar problem of landlocked countries, whose vulnerable populations live mainly in rural areas that are difficult to access owing to the poor road infrastructure. It would be appreciated if an integrated approach, incorporating support for the rural communication infrastructure, were adopted.

Another problem unique to some of those countries is that, although they are neither facing nor emerging from conflict, they are host to a large number of refugees from neighbouring countries. Zambia is currently hosting approximately 270,000 refugees in designated camps and 130,000 outside the camps from various countries, including Angola, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Given their large numbers, the refugees places a great deal of pressure on the fragile economies and social infrastructure of the host areas. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the 130,000 refugees who have settled among the local population in the urban and border areas receive no humanitarian assistance from the international community. That group of refugees, therefore, competes with the host communities for social services such as food and for economic opportunities. Consequently, there is added pressure on local authorities already struggling to provide scarce and limited social opportunities such as education, health, water and sanitation, as well as communication and transport. We feel that the problem of spontaneously settled refugees should be addressed, because that vulnerable group of people also requires assistance. However, since such refugees live among the local population, it is logical that efforts to support them should focus on the host communities as well.

Before I conclude, I wish to consider the recommendations contained in the report. In general, my delegation welcomes those recommendations, particularly with regard to the need to enhance regional capacities to respond to humanitarian emergencies, the promotion of a culture of protection, the need to adequately fund countries that are in a process of transition from relief to development, and the need to strengthen humanitarian strategies and resource mobilization efforts through increased support from donor and non-governmental organizations. My delegation urges that the United Nations implementing agencies, while strengthening regional structures, should consider it a priority to assist in the development of strong early warning systems and preparedness measures, as that would greatly lessen the impact of crises and disasters.

With regard to reaching vulnerable populations, my delegation wishes to reiterate its earlier recommendation that the social infrastructure of communities be strengthened in order to enable those communities to effectively provide adequate protection and individual security. Such an effort requires strategies and logistics that reflect the uniqueness of each type of problem. Therefore, we appeal to the international community to support local efforts by Governments to address humanitarian concerns.

Finally, my delegation commends the United Nations and the international community for the tireless humanitarian assistance efforts undertaken around the globe. Those efforts make a difference in the daily lives of the people who need such assistance. We will continue to look to the United Nations for support of our noble endeavour to make this world a home for all humanity.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.